

March 17, 1967

Academician Igor Tamm
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Moscow B 134, U.S.S.R.

Dear Dr. Tamm:

I write you with best greetings and wishes for your good health.

I have no very good excuse to choose you to be the target of the request I am about to make, except the bond of good fellowship that our convergence in Stockholm represented in 1958 in the name of the ultimately humanitarian purposes of scientific investigation. I am sure that you have had the same experience that I have since that distinction. For many reasons, a concern for the human purposes of science is deepened among those who have achieved such distinctions.

In any event, I have found great enjoyment during the past year in a new enterprise, namely to write a weekly column for an important national newspaper, The Washington Post, on the general theme of science and man. It is my experience that these writings have reached a very influential segment of the intelligentsia of this country, particularly those associated with government life in Washington. In the near future a somewhat wider dissemination of this writing is anticipated, as the column is about to be syndicated to a number of newspapers in other cities. There is, I believe, not very much precedent for this particular kind of involvement on the part of a scientist, although of course many wiser heads have had much to say to the public on similar issues. I do not have any strong political orientation in my writings. My main purpose is to expose one or another facet of the way in which scientific advance, or more generally, rational thinking, could impinge on human policy. I would not, therefore, point to any single column as having any important impact, but it is my hope that their cumulative effect may not be wholly insignificant.

I am writing just at this moment to ask your advice and help about the possibility of finding a way to make such a regular column available to readers in your country. I certainly do not expect it to appear in any mass circulation vehicle, any more than it is likely to do so in this country. However, I could not but believe that there would be a definite interest in having this kind of window into a branch of thinking about subjects of general interest as another channel of communication between our countries, and one that can be undertaken on a strictly private basis without formal intervention of national authorities.

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The Washington Post is already prepared to distribute this column on a regular basis to newspapers in a number of countries, but I doubt if it has any formal arrangements with the Tass news service, or any other U.S.S.R. vehicles. If you can see any merit in the wider availability of these writings, I would be very grateful to you for any comment you may have, and possibly for an introduction to the appropriate offices for further consideration of such a plan. The English language edition of the weekly "Moscow News" has an orientation that does not appear to be too inconsistent with my purposes in communication, but I have, of course, only the most superficial insight into the considerations that might govern any decision that could be reached on this suggestion.

I am taking the liberty of enclosing a few sample copies of my columns, which I would be most happy to bring to your attention, quite independently of anything else that might be done with them.

With cordial regards,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics